Safeguarding against failure in intellectual character education

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Safeguarding Against Failure in Intellectual Character Education: The Case of the Eristic Agent

Abstract: The vast majority of contemporary scholars (e.g. MacAllister, 2012; Baehr, 2013, 2016; Pritchard, 2013, 2016) working in intellectual character education endeavor to identify those elements that render an educational program reliably successful at fostering the growth of intellectual excellences in students. In this paper, I adopt an opposite perspective: I examine potential reasons as to why virtue-based approaches to education might fail to enable students to acquire intellectual virtues.

Given the scarcity of accounts of educational failure in contemporary intellectual character education, I search for such accounts in the philosophical roots of the concept of intellectual virtues. In this paper, I focus on Plato's discussion of the eristic agent, viz. an individual who has developed epistemically valuable cognitive abilities but, due to insufficient moral character education, results in misusing them to pursue non-epistemic and quite often also non-moral ends.

I argue that Plato's account of the eristic practice has much to offer to intellectual character education today. It strongly indicates that intellectual virtues cannot be fostered in isolation from moral virtues and that the development of the students' (i) epistemic emotions and (ii) moral virtues should take place prior to the fostering of intellectual excellences in them.

Keywords: intellectual character education, educational failure, Plato, eristic.

Introductory Remarks

Following the formulation (Sosa, 1980) and subsequent growth - from the 80's onwards - of contemporary virtue approaches to epistemology (e.g. Baehr, 2011, 2016b; Code, 1987; Greco, 2002, 2010; Pritchard 2005, 2010; Sosa, 1991, 2007; Zagzebski, 1996), the concept of intellectual virtues has, in recent years, also been introduced to education (e.g. Baehr 2016; Battaly, 2006; Kotzee, 2013; Pritchard, 2013). Prior to that, contemporary virtue approaches to education were predominantly concerned with the fostering of moral virtues in students[1] (e.g. Carr, 1991).

There is no universally accepted definition of the notion of intellectual virtues in contemporary virtue epistemology. Virtue scholars, depending on their conception of intellectual virtues, are often categorized into two groups: (i) virtue reliabilists (this group includes scholars such as Sosa, 1991; Greco, 2002; Pritchard, 2005) and (ii) virtue responsibilists (this group includes scholars such as Code, 1987; Zagzebski, 1996; Roberts and Wood, 2007). Virtue reliabilists conceive of intellectual virtues as *faculty-based* (Greco and Turri, 2011). They define

intellectual virtues as innate faculties or acquired habits that 'help maximize one's surplus of truth over error' (Sosa, 1991, p. 225) and proceed to categorize epistemically valuable faculties, such as good memory and perception, as intellectual virtues (thus the term *faculty-based* virtues). Contrarily, virtue responsibilists conceive of intellectual virtues as *character-based* (Greco and Turri, 2011). They define intellectual virtues as acquired excellences, for which the agent is responsible, '…involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end' (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 137) and proceed to identify epistemically valuable character traits, such as intellectual humility and conscientiousness, as intellectual virtues (thus the term *character-based* virtues).

Yet, despite their theoretical differences, contemporary virtue epistemologists argue that the principal goal of every educational program should be to enable students to excel intellectually - that is, to develop intellectual virtues. Significantly, according to Baehr (who is a virtue responsibilist), 'fostering growth in intellectual virtues should be the central educational aim' (2013, p. 249). Similarly, according to Pritchard (who is a virtue reliabilist), 'a core epistemic end of educations consists in the enhancement of the subject's cognitive abilities and intellectual virtues' (2016, p. 113). Batally summarizes the primary goal of intellectual character education quite concisely: 'Many of us not only want our students to learn about better ways of thinking, but to become better thinkers. We want our students to become skilled in deductive and inductive reasoning… and to care about truth for its own sake. In short, we want our students to become intellectually virtuous' (2006, p. 191).

The vast majority of studies on intellectual character education (e.g. Baehr, 2013, 2016; MacAllister, 2012; Pritchard, 2013, 2016) primarily look into, or aspire to create, accounts of successful intellectual virtue education (in the sense of being reliably successful at fostering the growth of epistemic virtues in students). As far as I am aware, very few attempts[2] have been made in contemporary intellectual virtue education to develop theoretical accounts of how educating in epistemic virtues might fail (I consider unsuccessful the kind of intellectual character education that aims at fostering the growth of epistemic virtues in students but fails to do so on a consistent and reliable basis). Given this scarcity of accounts of educational failure in contemporary intellectual character education, I look for such accounts in the philosophical history of the concept. In this paper, I focus on one such account: Plato's discussion in the *Republic* of how intellectual virtue education might go astray and produce eristic agents (viz., agents who use their cognitive abilities for non-epistemic and non-virtuous purposes). The chief merit of looking into

Plato's account of the *eristic* agent is that it can provide us with unique insights on how intellectual character education might go wrong and thus help us safeguard, as much as possible, against such failures from occurring in practice.

I begin my discussion with a short summary of the rigorous Platonic educational program as presented in the *Republic*. Through this brief synopsis, I identify Plato's educational goals and methods for guaranteeing the success of his program. I proceed to discuss Plato's description of the eristic individual and his account of how such an agent is produced by educational failure. My discussion focuses on Plato's account of the eristic agent and the practice of eristics as described in the *Republic* (VII, 537e-540a), though it also includes extracts from early Socratic dialogues[3] such as the *Meno* and the *Gorgias*. Then, I move on to argue that the Platonic account of the eristic agent can be of significant merit for contemporary virtue education. Plato's account of eristics indicates that intellectual virtues cannot be fostered in isolation from moral virtues and that the development of the students' (i) epistemic emotions and (ii) moral virtues should take place prior to the fostering of intellectual excellences in them.

The Platonic Educational Program

The philosopher-kings' decades-long educational regime is a central theme of the *Republic*. Plato's abandonment of Socratic intellectualism[4] and the development - from the middle dialogues onwards - of the tripartite theory of the soul, plays a key role in the formulation of his educational theory. The soul is now understood by Plato as having three parts - (i) the rational, (ii) the spirited and (iii) the appetitive - with each part desiring a different kind of objects: the rational part has desires of a rational nature (e.g. truth and wisdom), the spirited part has desires of a spirited nature (e.g. honor) and the appetitive part has desires of an appetitive nature (e.g. food and sexual intercourse) (*Rep*., IV, 439a-440e). Having opposing desires[5] (on account of its different parts), the human soul will be in constant internal conflict and imbalance. This is unless the soul is led by reason and all three parts of it, realizing their natural role, co-exist in harmony (X, 589a5-c). Still, a harmonious soul led by reason can only be brought about through the right moral character education (IV, 442a) that aims at the development of moral virtues such as for example the virtue of self-control[6] and justice[7] (435a-b). This fostering of moral virtues leading to a harmonious soul is a central aim of the Platonic educational program.

Nevertheless, developing moral virtues in students is not the end goal of the Platonic educational regime. Its ultimate aim is to enable students to reach understanding of the Forms. Having a harmonious soul led by rational desires is a necessary condition for epistemic success (i.e. the acquisition of epistemic goods such as truth) but not a sufficient one. In order to be epistemically successful, an agent also needs to develop epistemically valuable cognitive abilities (in the sense that they help the agent acquire epistemic goods) such as the ability to think abstractly and the ability to debate. According to Plato, it is only those who have acquired an intellectual grasp of the Forms who should rule the city-state because they are the only people who, having seen the Forms, will attempt to imitate the Forms' divine patterns in their ruling. Having seen the Forms, philosopher-kings are wise in both practical and theoretical matters (*Rep*., VII, 540a2-540b5). In the *Republic*, science, morality and statesmanship merge (Rowe, 1984, p. 66). The ideal city-state, in order to exist, needs to be ruled by philosopher-kings; and philosopher-kings, to exist, need the right educational system. This is principally why Plato dedicates a large part of the *Republic* to presenting and defending his educational theory.

Hence, the Platonic educational regime has two fundamental goals: (i) the development of harmonious souls and steady characters in students (through the acquisition of moral virtues) and (ii) the development of intellectual virtues. And what is most significant is that it starts with the former before proceeding to ensure the latter. The guardians' education begins with literary (*Rep*., III, 376c5-403c5) and physical/military education (403c5-412a). This early stage of the educational program aims at fostering the growth of a steady character and a harmonious soul in students (VII, 522a5-b). Guardians who have demonstrated an aptitude for learning will proceed to the second stage which consists of the study of the five mathematical sciences: arithmetic (524e-526c), plane geometry (526d-527c), solid geometry (527d-528e), astronomy (529a-530c) and harmonics (530d-531c). The principal aim of this second stage is to train guardians in abstract thinking - which is a necessary cognitive ability for those who will advance to the study of the dialectic (527b10-c). Finally, those who have excelled in their studies, will now be introduced to the final stage of Plato's educational program: the study of the dialectic (531d-534e). Those fully trained in the methodology of the dialectic, acquire the cognitive ability of debate: they are experts at giving an account of the essence of each thing and ask and answer questions with the highest precision (534). According to Plato, those who employ the dialectical method successfully are able to reach understanding of the Forms, including the Form of the good (532a). The completion of

Plato's educational program in its entirety takes approximately fifty years and only a handful of students complete all of its stages successfully.

The Platonic Account of the Eristic Individual

Still, in his discussion of the ideal city-state, Plato does not only develop a detailed account of his educational program; he also produces and discusses an account of how virtue education, if not properly structured, can fail to produce philosophers (i.e. lovers of wisdom: agents motivated by their rational desires for the acquisition of epistemic goods) and instead result in producing eristic agents (i.e. individuals who employ their cognitive abilities for personal, non-epistemic, ends). Plato's account of educational failure is presented at the last part of book VII of the *Republic* - right after he has finished discussing the curriculum of the philosopher's education - and serves as a cautionary tale.

In this section of the *Republic*, Plato contrasts the practice of eristics (which was taught and practiced by the sophists) with the methodology of the dialectic (which Plato identifies as the methodology followed by his philosopher-kings). According to Plato, the eristic agents are sophists and rhetoricians who, following the eristic practice, develop arguments that are often absurd or paradoxical and use them as a means of beating the competitions and/or for the entertainment of the crowd (Beresford and Brown, 2005). Their goal is to lead their opponents, through elaborate arguments, to contradict themselves and/or reach implausible conclusions[8]. In contrast, being motivated by their rational desires, philosophers develop arguments that aim at finding truth (VII, 539c10-15). For the untrained eye, it is easy to confuse the practice of eristics with the methodology of the dialectic (Beresford and Brown, 2005, p. 156). Still, their difference is not methodological but one of purpose (Nehamas, 1990, pp. 8-9 - see also Kerferd, 1981, p. 66). The eristic agents are expert at the dialectic but misuse it: they employ it for the purpose of beating their opponents in debate rather than as a method for searching for truth.

The Platonic account of the eristic agent and his discussion of the educational failure that brings about such agents begins with Socrates' warning that the study of the dialectic fills students with indiscipline (*Rep*., VII, 537e3) because it shows to them that the popular opinions (on what is right and honorable) they have been brought up from childhood are wrong (538c). Having lost their respect for their previously held beliefs, students will be led to believe that there is no difference between right and wrong, honorable and disgraceful and will turn to a life dedicated to

the pursuit of appetitive desires (538e-539a[9]). It is for these reasons, therefore, that according to Plato, great precaution must be taken to not educate students in the dialectical method when they are not ready:

> '"Then if you want to avoid being sorry for your thirty-year-olders, you must be very careful how you introduce them to such discussions."
> "Very Careful"
> "And there's one great precaution you can take, which is to stop their getting a taste of them too young. You must have noticed, how young men, after their first taste of argument, are always contradicting people just for the fun of it; they imitate those whom they hear cross-examining each other, and themselves cross-examine, other people like puppies who love to pull and tear at anything within reach"' (539b, trans. Lee)[10].

But what is it that makes one ready to be introduced to the study of the dialectic? According to Plato, it is only men and women[11] of steady and disciplined character combined with a harmonious soul (i.e. agents who have developed moral virtues and their soul is led by the rational part) that should be educated in the methodology of the dialectic (*Rep*., VII, 539d[12]). Such agents will not turn to the pursuit of appetitive desires once they realize that the popular opinions they have been brought up with are wrong. Having strong rational desires, they will persevere in their quest for the acquisition of epistemic goods.

Sections 538e to 539d of the *Republic* shows that in the absence of moral virtues, dialectical expertise leads to sophistry. For Plato, the criterion demarcating agents that employ their dialectical expertise for epistemic goods from agents that employ it for non-epistemic ends is a steady and disciplined character. As already noted, the practice of sophistry and the methodology of the dialectic are not different methods of argument - their difference lies in the intentions and goals of the agents. Philosophers (i.e. agents who have developed moral virtues and are motivated by their rational desires) employ the dialectic method for what it is (i.e. a method for searching for truth) and are not interested in who wins or loses the debate; they are solely interested in formulating arguments that are aimed at finding the truth (539c10-15). They work together rather than against each other. This collaboration between interlocutors is summarized in the *Meno*[13]:

> 'And if the man who'd asked the questions was one of those expert quibblers (eristic agents) who just want to "win" arguments then what I'd say to him is this: "Look, I've made my claim. If what I'm saying isn't right that's your problem: it's up to you to question me and prove me wrong" But if the two of us were friends and wanted to talk things

> through, with one another - the way you and I are doing now - then I'd have to go a bit easier on him and answer in a more talk-it-through kind of way. And I suppose "a more talk-it-through kind of way" means not just giving an answer that's true but also only answering by way of things the other person admits he knows, when you ask him' (75 c-d, trans. Beresford).

Philosophers are partners in their quest for the truth. They do not seek to outsmart their interlocutors with (unnecessarily) elaborate answers. They answer using points which the other party can comprehend.

Those who have not had the right character training and have not thus developed a steady and disciplined character and a harmonious soul (i.e. agents who have not developed moral virtues and their soul is not led by the rational part) will end up developing eristic arguments if trained in the dialectic. Such agents will be motivated to act by non-rational desires (e.g. out of their desire for honor or moneymaking) and will simply be interested in scoring points against their opponents (*Rep*., V, 454a-c).

Of course, the topic of eristics - also known as sophistry (Nehamas, 1990, p. 4): the practice of using elaborate arguments for personal gain - is not discussed for the first time in the *Republic*. Plato makes numerous remarks about the sophists and their teachings of eristics in a number of dialogues that predate the *Republic*. For example, sophistry is discussed extensively in the *Gorgias*. Socrates' main argument in this early Socratic dialogue is quite similar to the one Plato makes in the *Republic* (although Socrates does not link it - at least not as clearly as Plato does in the *Republic* - to educational failure). He argues that being an expert at the method of the dialectic without having developed moral virtues and a rational desire for rational goods leads to sophistry, i.e. developing elaborate arguments in order to beat others in debate for the sole purpose of promoting personal benefit. Replying to Gorgias' claim that sophistry is the highest of skills, Socrates argues that it is not actually a skill (*techne*) but a knack: It seeks at flattery with no consideration of what is best; and cannot give an account of the essence of each thing (*Gorg*., 465a). In the *Euthydemus*, Plato notes that the agent following the eristic practice is a much larger threat for herself and society than the agent who, lacking training in the dialectic, avoids engaging in philosophical discussions:

> 'For I suppose there is more mischief when a man uses anything wrongly than when he lets it alone. In the one case there is evil; in the other there is neither evil nor good' (*Euthyd*., 280e-281a, trans. Gifford).

Overall, according to the Platonic account of eristics, if an agent lacking moral virtues and rational desires is trained in the methodology of the dialectic, they will end up employing the eristic practice: using ingenious arguments for non-epistemic reasons rather than out of genuine desire for the acquisition of epistemic goods.

The Value of Plato's Account of Educational Failure for Contemporary Virtue Education

Both the virtue responsibilist and the virtue reliabilist approaches to virtue epistemology would perceive Plato's account of the eristic agent alike: they would both attribute this agent's actions to a lack of epistemic motivations. For the responsibilist camp, the eristic individual clearly lacks the motivational component of intellectual virtues that, according to them, is essential for an agent to possess intellectual virtues. For example, according to Baehr (2016b, p. 87), 'A subject S possesses an intellectual virtue V only if S's possession of V is rooted in a "love" of epistemic goods' (for more on the motivational component of intellectual virtues see for example Montmarquet, 1993, p. 30; Roberts and Wood, 2007, p. 305 and Zagzebski, 1996, p. 137[14]). Thus, for the virtue responsibilists, the eristic agent does not possess intellectual virtues because such an individual is not predisposed to act out of love for epistemic goods but out of desire to advance their (non-epistemic) self-interest.

For the reliabilist camp, the eristic agent has developed an epistemically valuable (in the sense of enabling the agent to acquire epistemic goods) cognitive ability: the ability to formulate good arguments, give good replies and spot the weaknesses of their interlocutors' arguments/positions. We can call this the cognitive ability of debate. If used properly, the cognitive ability of debate can help the agent maximize their 'surplus of truth over error' (Sosa, 1991, p. 225). However, the eristic agent uses their ability in debate for their own personal (non-epistemic) gain. Hence, for the virtue reliabilists, the eristic agent has developed an epistemically valuable ability but ends up misusing it - i.e. not using it in order to acquire epistemic goods.

Plato's account of the eristic agent highlights the importance of an education of emotions and moral virtues for epistemic success. Such education should be the cornerstone of every approach

to intellectual virtue education (irrespectively of whether this stems from a reliabilist or responsibilist understanding of intellectual virtues). The eristic individual is a case of educational failure resulting from introducing those who are not ready to the dialectic, and as such, highlights the fact that if one is given/taught the methodological tools without having the right epistemic motivation (a strong rational desire for rational goods) and a steady character (moral virtues) developed through the right character training, one is led to misuse of the cognitive abilities they have developed. For example, the eristic agent results in using their cognitive ability in debate for non-epistemic and non-moral purposes: consider, for instance, the case of a politician who is motivated to use any argument at their disposal, no matter how absurd, in order to gain advantage over their opponents in the political sphere - and that is why aspiring politicians from all over Greece came to Athens to be educated by the sophists in the practice of eristics.

The Platonic account of the eristic agent shows that virtue-based approaches to education must start with the development of the students' (i) moral virtues and (ii) epistemic emotions before proceeding to the development of intellectual virtues. Although distinct, these two main goals of virtue education (i.e. the development of moral virtues and the development of epistemic emotions) are closely interconnected: they both aim at safeguarding that the students will employ the cognitive abilities they will develop for the acquisition of epistemic goods.

By fostering the growth of moral virtues, such as the virtue of honesty, character education ensures that students will not use the cognitive abilities they will later develop for non-moral purposes (e.g. to manipulate the public in order to make profit). Moreover, it also helps students develop moral virtues, such as the virtue of self-control, that are instrumental for their epistemic success. The virtue of self-control is quite significant for it enables students to control their non-rational desires and thus allows them to dedicate their efforts in epistemic pursuits (rather than in the pursuit of unnecessary non-rational desires[15]) unhindered. For Plato, moral virtues are a necessary prerequisite for the development of intellectual ones: if students do not develop moral virtues they will be led by their appetitive desires (*Rep*., IX, 588d-589a4) and will have no interest in engaging in epistemic pursuits. This is why it is crucial that virtue education begins with the fostering of moral virtues before proceeding with the development of intellectual ones.

Fostering the growth of epistemic emotions is also a goal of fundamental importance for character education. Epistemic emotions are emotions specifically directed at epistemic goods and play a significant role in our pursuit of such goods since they motivate us in our epistemic

endeavors (Morton, 2010, p. 385 - see also Stocker, 2010; Kashdan and Silvia, 2011; Brady, 2013, 2014). Examples of such epistemic emotions include curiosity, wonder, intrigue and fascination (Turri, Alfano and Greco, 2017). Instilling in students such emotions safeguards that they will use the cognitive abilities they will later acquire for the acquisition of epistemic ends. According to the Platonic educational program, a key epistemic emotion that all students must develop at this early stage of virtue education is love for epistemic goods. Students should become philosophers (viz. lovers of wisdom). According to Plato, a philosopher is characterized by her passion for '…wisdom of every kind without distinction' (*Rep*., V, 475b), she is '…glad to learn and never satisfied' (475c) and does not '…rest content with each set of particulars which opinion takes for reality, but soars with undimmed and unwearied passion till (she) grasps the nature of each thing' (490b). Students who have developed such powerful epistemic emotions will have no interest in the pursuit of non-rational goods (485e).

The importance Plato places on such character education as a precedent to the development of intellectual virtues is the reason why the Platonic educational program in the *Republic* begins with literary and physical education. This first stage of Plato's educational program does not offer training in intellectual excellences - it aims at helping students develop a morally virtuous character that is led by reason:

> 'That…was the complement of their physical education. It gave a training by habituation, and used music and rhythm to produce a certain harmony and balance of character and not knowledge; and its literature, whether fictional or factual, had similar effects. There was nothing in it to produce the effect you are seeking (i.e. the transition from the phenomenal world to the reality of the Forms)' (VII, 522a5-b).

It is only after students have developed moral virtues, such as for example the virtue of self-control and justice, and after they have acquired a strong desire for rational goods that they are allowed to proceed to the study of the disciplines (i.e. the five mathematical studies and the dialectic) that will enable them to develop intellectual excellences.

Plato's account of the eristic agent shows that an education fostering the growth of moral virtues and epistemic emotions in students is a necessary prerequisite for epistemic success and should be the starting point of every virtue-based approach to education. This comes in contrast to intellectual virtue education theories currently being developed. The vast majority of contemporary scholars working on intellectual virtue education theories disregard the instrumental

role of also fostering moral virtues for epistemic success. They formulate intellectual character approaches without taking into consideration the importance of moral virtues for successful intellectual character education (see Baehr, 2013, 2016; Batally, 2016; MacAllister, 2012; Pritchard, 2013, 2016). Plato's account of the eristic practice reveals the fact that intellectual virtues cannot be developed in isolation from moral virtues. Students who acquire cognitive abilities, such as the ability to make elaborate arguments, but have not developed a good character (i.e. have not developed moral virtues and a rational desire to acquire the truth) will result in employing those abilities for non-epistemic and quite often also non-moral ends.

One might argue, contrarily to Plato, that there is nothing wrong with educating for intellectual virtues prior to the development of moral virtues. Still, I believe that Plato's point according to which one cannot not successfully educate for intellectual virtues before educating for moral virtues is correct in both the case of fostering of *faculty-based* virtues and the case of fostering of *character-based* virtues.

It is indeed the case that one needs to educate for moral virtues and epistemic emotions before educating for *faculty-based* virtues. Moral virtues (e.g. self-control) and epistemic emotions (e.g. love for epistemic goods) enable the students to practice epistemically valuable cognitive abilities for their intended purpose - i.e. the acquisition of epistemic goods. Students who have developed cognitive abilities before moral virtues, will have mastered to employ such abilities for the acquisition of non-epistemic goods. Were such students to acquire moral virtues after having acquired such cognitive abilities, they would lack the necessary knowledge of how to use such abilities for their intended purpose. For example, the student who possessed the cognitive virtue of debate prior to moral virtues would know how to use arguments in order to beat their opponents in debate for her personal gain (since she would have extensive practice on doing so) but would not know how to employ arguments in order to acquire epistemic goods.

In the case of fostering character-*based* virtues, virtue responsibilists focus on the virtuous agent's epistemic motivations rather than her reliability in acquiring epistemic goods. Still, having the proper orientation towards epistemic goods cannot possibly come prior to the development of moral virtues and epistemic emotions. Moral virtues (such as self-control) regulate non-rational desires thus enabling the cultivation of epistemic desires in students. Epistemic emotions (such as curiosity) are an integral element of the virtuous agent's epistemic motivations - without them an agent cannot come to develop intellectual virtues.

One might also argue that safeguarding against the development of eristic agents is outside the scope of virtue reliabilism which advocates the growth of intellectual virtues such as various kinds of good reasoning. Still, facilitating reliabilist virtues alone does not suffice to protect students from becoming eristic agents. In order to educate agents to care about the truth for its own sake, the reliabilist educational project needs to build on a pedagogical program that fosters the development of the students' moral virtues and epistemic emotions. One could also endeavor to defend the virtue responsibilist position by arguing that the development of eristic agents is a non-issue for them. After all, part of their educational program involves developing the students' motivation for truth thus safeguarding against educational failures such as pointed out by Plato's account of the eristic agent. Still, figuring out exactly how to facilitate the growth of epistemic motivations in students remains somewhat unclear for the responsibilist view. In this paper, I argue that this kind of motivational training comes (necessarily) through the development of moral virtues and the growth of epistemic emotions. Without such motivational training, the responsibilist educational project remains incomplete and vulnerable to failure.

Concluding Remarks

My aim in this paper has been to look into Plato's account of the eristic individual, as presented in Book Seven of the *Republic*, and explore what this account has to offer to contemporary approaches to virtue education that aim at fostering the growth of intellectual virtues in students. I argue that the insights derived from Plato's account of the eristic agent are quite significant for contemporary intellectual character education. This Platonic account of educational failure sheds light to aspects of virtue education that contemporary scholars have overlooked but are instrumental in bringing about success in intellectual character education[16]. It highlights the dependence of intellectual excellences on moral virtues when it comes to virtue education (viz. the importance of moral character education for the epistemic success of the agent). It also indicates that virtue-based approaches to education that aspire to succeed in fostering the growth of intellectual virtues in students must necessarily begin with the instilling of epistemic emotions and moral virtues in them.

Notes

[1]That is not to say that educational accounts primarily concerned with moral character training haven't also recently been developed. See Curren, 2014 and Kristjánsson, 2015.
[2]Battaly, 2013 is such an attempt from an Aristotelian and Neo-Aristotelian perspective.
[3]Throughout this paper, I follow Vlastos' (1991) classification of early, middle and late Platonic dialogues.
[4]The standard view is that Plato's development of the tripartite division of the soul theory denotes his abandonment of Socratic intellectualism (see Cooper, 1984; Nehamas, 1999). Still, it should be noted that some scholars have contested this view (see Carone 2001; Sedley, 2013). However, agreement with the latter does not present a problem for my overall argument. The development of the tripartite theory of the soul, irrespectively of whether it is meant to replace Socratic intellectualism or not, plays a key role in the formulation of Plato's educational theory.
[5]See Plato's example of opposing rational and appetitive desires: 'Now, can we say that men are sometimes unwilling to drink even though they are thirsty? ...Then how are we to describe such cases? ...Must we not say that there is one element in their minds which bids them drink, and a second which prevents them and masters the first?' (*Rep*., IV, 439c).
[6]For the importance of developing the virtue of self-control so that an individual's soul can be in harmony see *Rep*., IV, 442c5-15: 'Then don't we call him self-disciplined when all these three elements are in friendly and harmonious agreement, when reason and its subordinates are all agreed that reason should rule and there is no civil war amongst them? That is exactly what we mean by self-control in a city or in an individual'.
[7]For the importance of developing the virtue of justice so as to develop a harmonious soul see especially *Rep*., IV, 443d: 'The just man will not allow the three elements which make up his inward self to trespass on each other's functions or interfere with each other, but, by keeping all three in tune…will in the truest sense set his house to rights, attain self-master and order, and live on good terms with himself. When he has bound these elements into a disciplined and harmonious whole, and so become fully one instead of many, he will be ready for action of any kind…'
[8]See also Irwin, 1995, p. 585: 'It is characteristic of the eristic to think of some argument as a way of defeating the other side, by showing that an opponent must assent to the negation of what he initially took himself to believe'.
[9]'Then when he's lost any respect or feeling for his former beliefs but not yet found the truth, where is he likely to turn? Won't it be to a life which flatters his (appetitive) desires?'
[10]Throughout this paper, I am using Lee's (Lee and Lane, 2007) translation of the *Republic,* Irwin's (1979) translation of the *Gorgias*, Beresford's (Beresford and Brown, 2005) translation of the *Meno* and Gifford's (1905) translation of the *Euthydemus*.
[11]'And some of them will be women…all I have said about men applies equally to women' (*Rep*., VII, 540c).
[12]'In fact all we 've been saying has been said in the attempt to ensure that only men of steady and disciplined character shall be admitted to philosophic discussions, and not anyone, however unqualified, as happens at present'.
[13]Also, in the *Gorgias* (458a, trans. Irwin), Socrates impersonates the right approach to the method of the dialectic: 'What kind of man am I? … One of those who would be pleased to be refuted if I say something untrue, and pleased to refute if someone else were to say something untrue, yet not at all less pleased to be refuted than to refute'.
[14]For example, according to Zagzebski (1996, p. 137) all intellectual virtues involve a 'characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end' while according to Robert and Woods (2007, p. 305) 'love of knowledge' is a 'presupposition or necessary background of all the other intellectual virtues'.
[15]Unnecessary desires are, in part, those desires whose presence is not beneficial to the agent: 'Then do you think that, if we are to avoid arguing in the dark, we had better define the difference between necessary and unnecessary desires? Desires we can't avoid, or whose satisfaction benefits us, can fairly be called necessary, I think. We are bound by our very nature to want to satisfy both, are we not? But we can call

'unnecessary' all desires which we can be got rid of with practice, if we start young, and whose presence either does us no good or positive harm' (*Rep*., VIII, 558d10-559a10, trans. Lee).

[16]I do not postulate that my discussion of Plato's account of the eristic agent exhausts all possible causes for educational failure. Instead, I suggest some fundamental reasons (which the vast majority of contemporary scholars working in intellectual character education have overlooked) as to why, according to Plato, virtue-education might fail to produce intellectually virtuous students.

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